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(54) **SELF-SHIELDED VERTICAL
PROTON-LINEAR ACCELERATOR FOR
PROTON-THERAPY**

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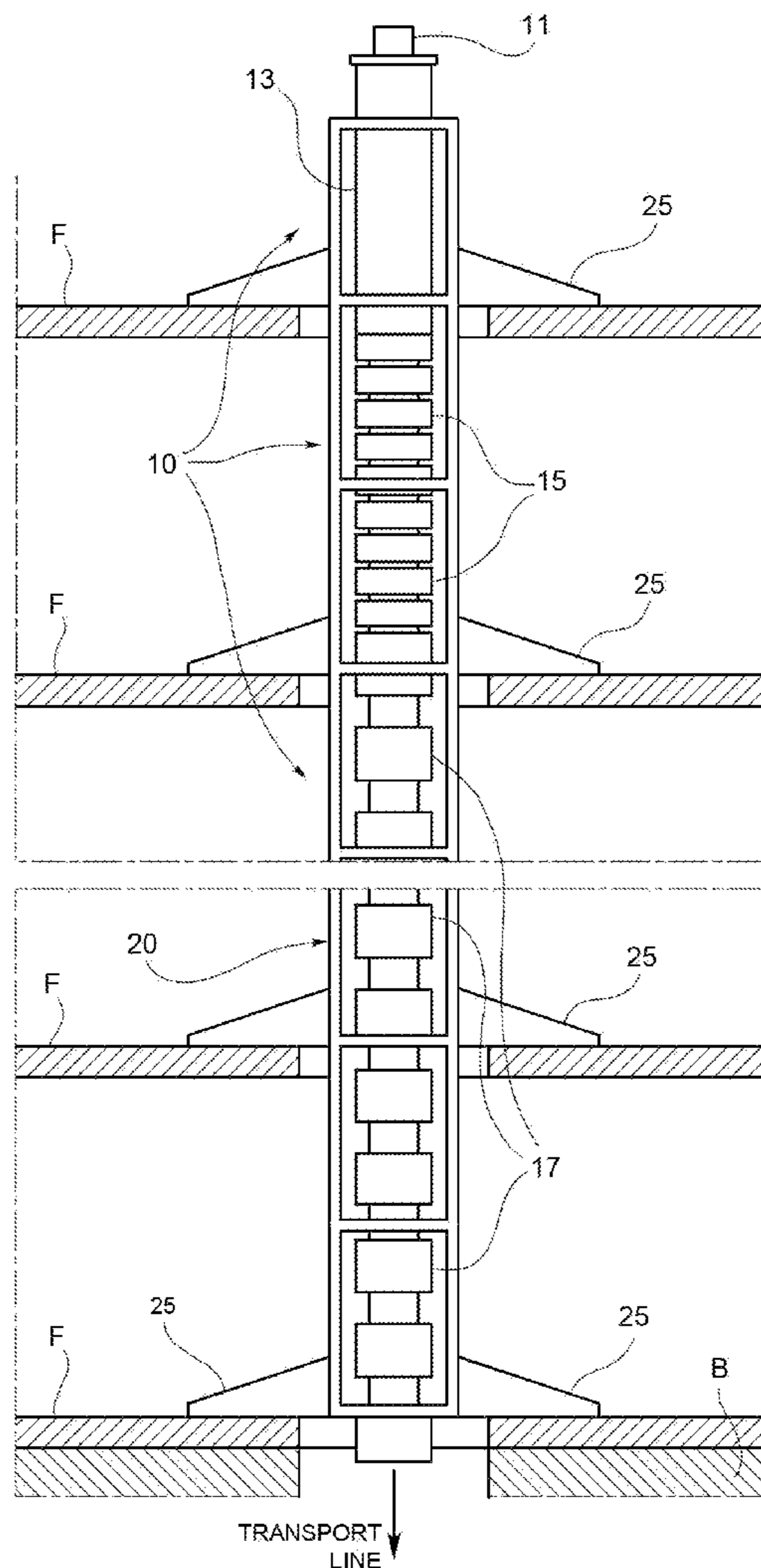
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A linear proton accelerator includes a plurality of accelerator components arranged after one another, and a proton source and a plurality of accelerating units. The accelerator further includes a reticular support structure for supporting the accelerator components. The support structure is shaped as a prism with a polygonal cross-section, and has a plurality of side faces joining opposite ends of the prism. The support structure is arranged concentrically with respect to the accelerator components.



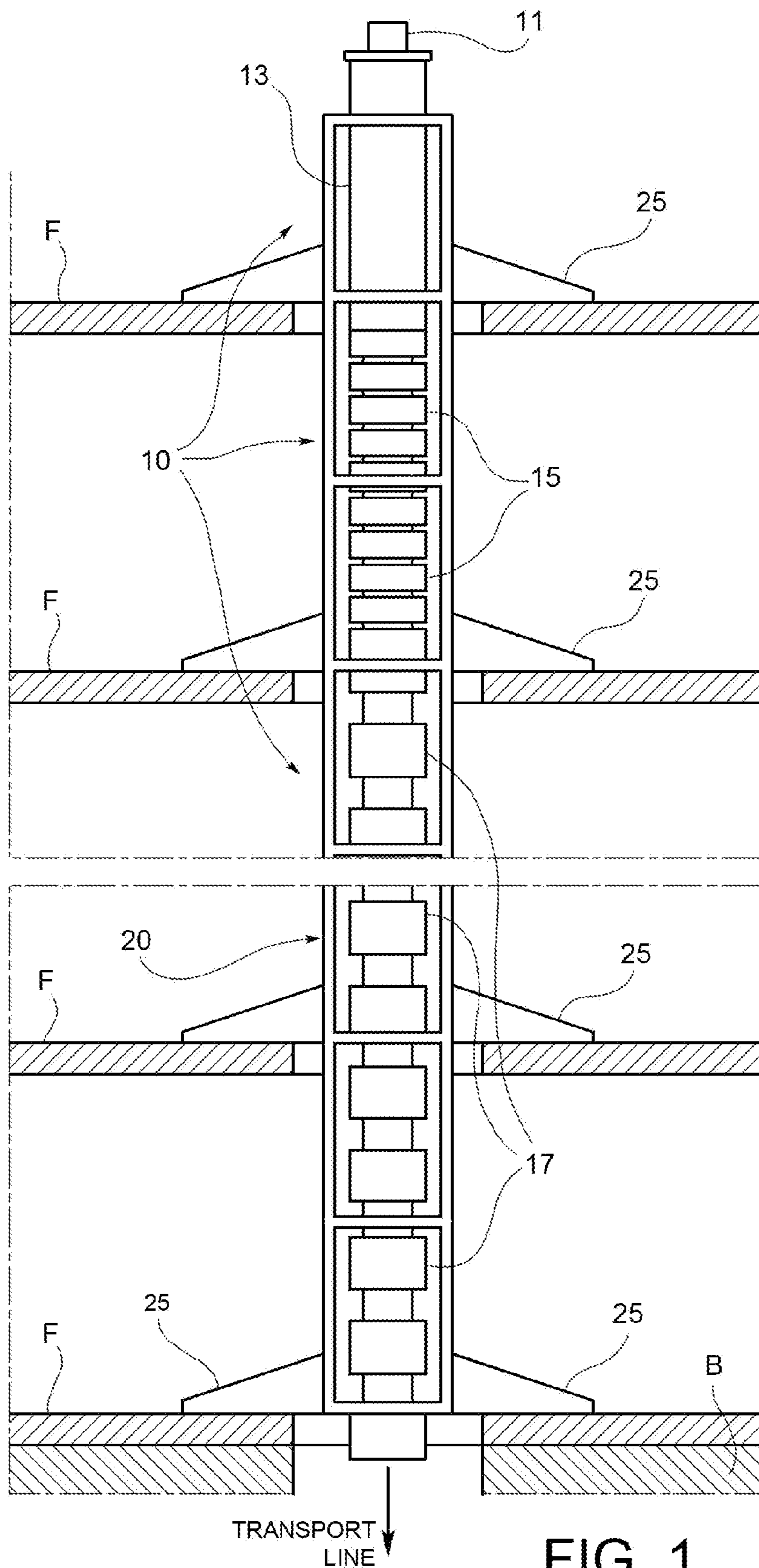


FIG. 1

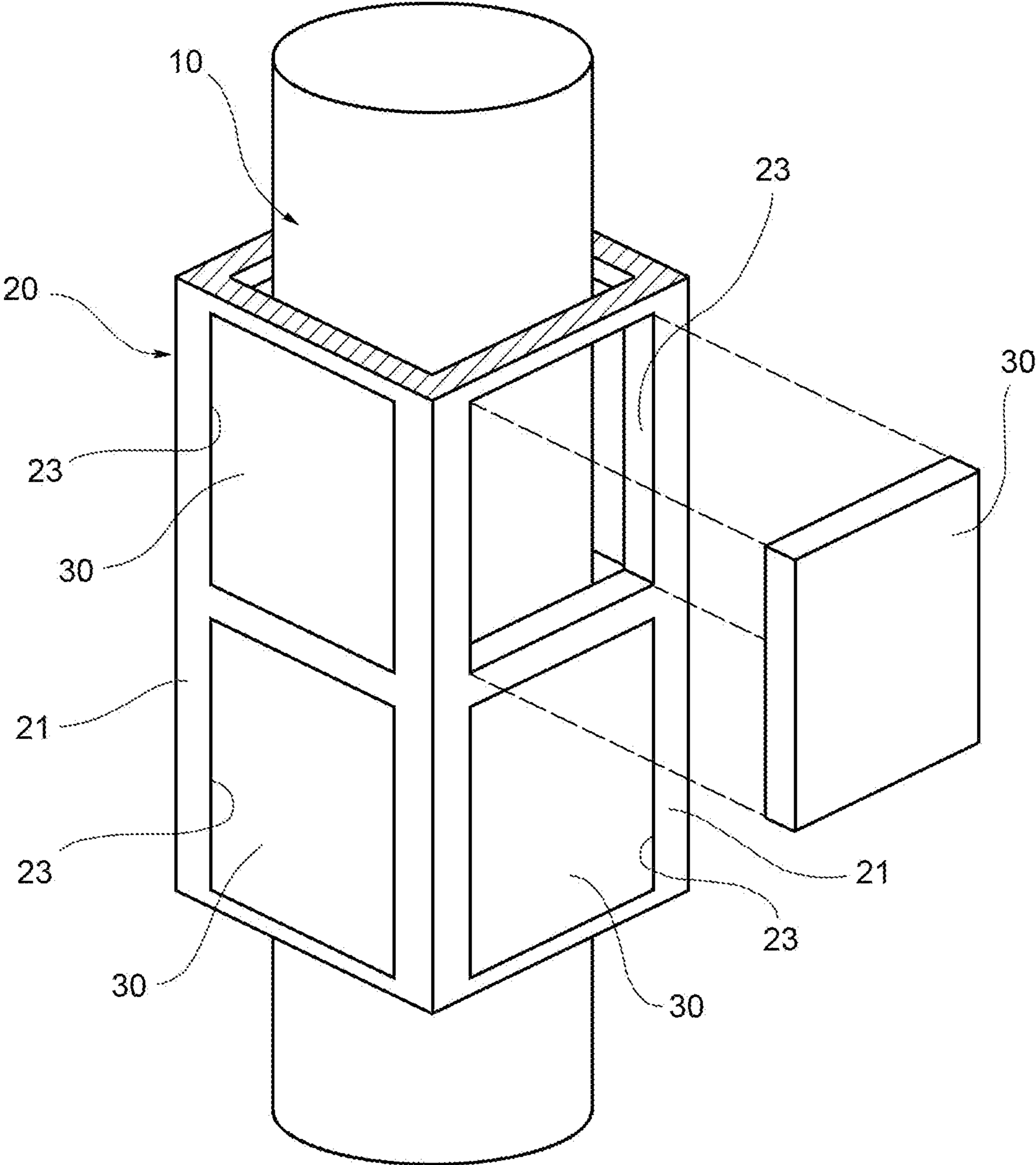


FIG. 2

**SELF-SHIELDED VERTICAL
PROTON-LINEAR ACCELERATOR FOR
PROTON-THERAPY**

[0001] This application is a Continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/321,079, filed 1 Jul. 2014, which claims benefit of Serial No. 13175973.0, filed 10 Jul. 2013 in the European Patent Office and which applications are incorporated herein by reference. To the extent appropriate, a claim of priority is made to each of the above disclosed applications.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention is related to an apparatus for the linear acceleration of protons for proton-therapy.

[0003] Proton-therapy is a type of particle therapy which uses a beam of protons to irradiate diseased tissue, most often in the treatment of cancer. The main advantage of proton therapy is the ability to more precisely localize the radiation dosage when compared with other types of external beam radiotherapy.

[0004] In the past and present, several technical approaches have been pursued for the accelerator that produces the proton beam. Mainly circular accelerators, like cyclotrons (or synchrocyclotrons) and synchrotrons have been used.

[0005] Also different types of accelerators have been proposed like linear accelerators, and they are currently under development at some research centers (Italy, CERN).

[0006] One of the main problems against the diffusion of proton-therapy is related to the cost of the facility. Despite the undoubtedly superior quality of the proton treatment vs the X-rays radiotherapy, the difference in costs between a proton-therapy installation and the best X-rays installation is still too high to permit a wide diffusion of the proton-therapy treatment.

[0007] The cost of a proton-therapy installation is strictly related to the facility layout. The accelerator cost covers only a small portion (usually around 20-30%) of the general cost, the main part being due to infrastructures, building, shielding and electricity.

[0008] The major drawback of the circular accelerators for their use in proton-therapy facilities is due just to the plant layout required, and especially to the heavy shielding required by the operation of those accelerators. These accelerators usually lose high energy particles that generate stray radiation to the environment (neutrons and X-rays).

[0009] In cyclotrons and synchrocyclotrons a particle is accelerated in circles to the desired energy and then ejected out of the machine by an extraction process whose efficiency is not larger than 70%. So some high energy beam is left inside the accelerator. Circular accelerators are very heavy machines, with weights of the order of 200 to 500 tons and with diameter range from 2 to 6 meters depending if built with superconducting coils or normally conducting coils. The beam energy is fixed to the maximum allowable energy so that to irradiate patients with a lower energy an external degrader has to be used. This, at the same time degrades also the beam quality, in such a way that an emittance filter is needed that transmits only 70%-10% of the generated current, depending on the energy degradation parameters.

[0010] In contrast to circular accelerators, linear accelerators known also as "linac" do not circulate the particle, but the particles go through a series of resonant cavities disposed linearly.

[0011] A linear accelerator is composed of two essential elements: the resonator, having a function of accelerating the particles; and the focusing system which is used to contain and confine the particle beam.

[0012] The main advantages of a linac for the application in proton-therapy consist in the accelerator dimension which is rather small in the transverse dimensions while it expands in the longitudinal dimension.

[0013] Moreover in a linac the particle transmission from the lowest to the highest energy can be virtually without particle losses. These two features combine fruitfully so to have an accelerator that can be easily shielded simplifying radio-protection requirements.

[0014] U.S. Pat. No. 4,392,080 discloses a linear particle accelerator.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0015] An object of the present invention is to provide a proton linear accelerator which can be installed in areas with limited spaces.

[0016] Accordingly, the invention proposes a linear proton accelerator including a plurality of accelerator components arranged after one another, said accelerator components comprising a proton source and a plurality of accelerating units, said accelerator further including a reticular support structure for supporting said accelerator components, said support structure being shaped as a prism with a polygonal cross-section and having a plurality of side faces joining opposite ends of the prism, wherein said support structure is arranged concentrically with respect to said accelerator components, and wherein a plurality of shielding slabs of radiation shielding material are mounted on respective openings formed on said side faces of the support structure.

[0017] The support structure of the present invention allows the linac to be positioned in any direction, even vertically, being the structures light and easily mountable. Therefore a vertical linac can be envisaged. Such a linac can be positioned in a tower with only the treatment room well sited in the basement of an existing hospital facility. This arrangement, not possible with any other type of accelerator, if not a linac, can solve installation problems in areas with limited space.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018] A preferred, but non-limiting, embodiment of the invention will now be described, with reference to the attached drawings, in which:

[0019] FIG. 1 is a schematic, elevation side view showing a proton linear accelerator according to the invention; and

[0020] FIG. 2 is a schematic, perspective view of a segment of the accelerator of FIG. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0021] With reference to FIG. 1, a linear accelerator according to a preferred embodiment of the invention is shown. This accelerator comprises conventionally a plurality of accelerator components 10 arranged after one another, and rigidly connected to one another so as to form a single string structure. Particularly, said accelerator components comprise a proton source 11, preferably a duoplasmatron or microwave proton source that delivers a pulsed proton beam up to 40 keV, an injector 13, preferably a radio-frequency quadrupole (RFQ) injector working in the RF frequency range between

350 MHz and 750 MHz that increases the energy of the proton beam in the range 3-5 MeV, and a plurality of accelerating units **15**, **17**, preferably a 3 GHz side coupled drift tube linac (SCDTL) segment composed by several SCDTL units **15**, increasing the energy of the proton beam up to an energy in the range 30-70 MeV, followed by a 3 GHz coupled cavity linac (CCL) segment composed by several CCL units, increasing the energy of the proton beam up to 230-250 MeV.

[0022] In the SCDTL units **15** the focusing would come from having short tanks composed of a few cells each and a quadrupole focusing between tanks.

[0023] In the CCL in order to focus the beam, cells are put together into tanks of limited length (a tank contains usually between 14 and 20 accelerating cells) and between the tanks permanent quadrupoles (PMQ) are placed; the electromagnetic field passes from one tank to the next via a bridge coupler.

[0024] The power for the full linac will be provided by several RF power units (not shown). Every power unit will be composed by a modulator and a klystron. The power is delivered to the accelerating tanks via the RF network system.

[0025] The proton linear accelerator according to the invention further includes a reticular support structure **20** for supporting the accelerator components **10**. As clearly shown in FIG. 2, the support structure **20** is shaped as a prism with a polygonal, particularly square, cross-section, and having a plurality of side faces **21** joining opposite ends of the prism. From a structural point of view, the support structure **20** is composed of a network of beams interconnected so as to form a prism-shaped framework. Such an arrangement of beams defines a plurality of openings **23** on the side faces **21** of the prism. In the embodiment shown in the drawings, these openings are configured as square-shaped windows.

[0026] The support structure **20** is arranged concentrically with respect to the accelerator components **10**. Connection means (not shown) are provided between at least some of the accelerator components **10** and the support structure **20**, for connecting the linear accelerator to the support structure **20** and enabling the linear accelerator to be supported by the support structure **20**.

[0027] In particular, the linear accelerator and the support structure **20** are positioned vertically. For example, they may be installed within a shaft formed in a multi-floor building such as a tower. To this end, the support structure **20** is equipped with a plurality of side brackets **25** extending laterally from and integral with the support structure **20**; by means of the side brackets **25** the support structure **20** rests on several floors F of the multi-floor building.

[0028] Treatment rooms (not show) are formed within a basement B of the building; a beam transport line composed

of magnetic dipoles and quadrupoles is provided at the output (lower) end of the linear accelerator for delivering the proton beam to the treatment rooms.

[0029] The self-shielded compact proton linear accelerator for proton-therapy in the preferred embodiment is equipped with a local radiation shield, that prevents the outflow of the spurious radiation (neutrons, gamma rays) generated in the structure by the very few beam losses.

[0030] The local radiation shield (shown in FIG. 2) are slabs **30** of radiation shielding material mounted on the openings **23** formed on the side faces **21** of the support structure **20**. Radiation shielding material is preferably selected from the group consisting of hydrogenated material, cadmium, lead or any combination of these. The shielding slabs **30** are positioned very close the accelerator components **10** and are mounted on the framework **20**.

What is claimed is:

1. A linear proton accelerator including a plurality of accelerator components arranged after one another, said accelerator components comprising:

a proton source;

a plurality of accelerating units; and

a reticular support structure for supporting said accelerator components, said support structure being shaped as a prism with a polygonal cross-section, and having a plurality of side faces joining opposite ends of the prism, wherein said support structure is arranged concentrically with respect to said accelerator components;

wherein a plurality of shielding slabs of radiation shielding material are mounted on respective openings formed on said side faces of the support structure.

2. An accelerator according to claim 1, wherein said proton source is a duoplasmatron or microwave proton source.

3. An accelerator according to claim 1, wherein said accelerator components further comprise an injector arranged after the proton source.

4. An accelerator according to claim 4, wherein said injector comprises a radio-frequency quadrupole injector arranged after the proton source.

5. An accelerator according to claim 1, wherein said accelerating units comprise a plurality of side coupled drift tube linac units and a plurality of coupled cavity linac units.

6. An accelerator according to claim 1, wherein said accelerator and support structure are positioned vertically.

7. An accelerator according to claim 6, wherein said support structure is configured for being installed within a multi-floor building, and is equipped with a plurality of side brackets extending laterally from the support structure, said side brackets being provided for supporting the support structure on respective floors of the multi-floor building.

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